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## THE MAYA DAY SIGN MANIK<sup>1</sup>

By STANSBURY HAGAR

IN two former papers the writer has marshalled evidence that the twenty Maya and Mexican day signs represent in sequence twenty constellations located around the circle of the ecliptic or zodiac. In the first paper this deduction was based upon the continuous correspondence between the symbolism of these day signs and that of the month signs, the monthly ritual and the various sequences of zodiacal constellations found in the codices and in the writers of the period following the Conquest, especially Tezozomoc, Sahagun, and Duran. In the second paper the deduction was supported by the correspondence between the rainy and dry seasons on the Mexican plateau and the position of the day signs with respect to these seasons as figured and symbolized in the Codex Vaticanus 3773.<sup>2</sup> A third verification of the deduction and



FIG. 87.—Manik Glyph,  
Dresden Codex, p. 4c.

of the identification of each day sign with a certain zodiacal constellation may be found in the correspondence between some of the names of the day signs and the alignment of the star groups to which they must be assigned in the sequence. The Maya day sign, Manik, offers perhaps the most impressive correspondence of this nature. Its glyph presents the figure of a hand closed as if in the act of grasping, and Dr Seler interprets it as giving in a gesture the invitation to eat<sup>3</sup> (fig. 87). Diverse meanings have been attributed to its name but Dr Brinton's explanation of it as "a hand that grasps" from *mach*, to grasp, seems most consistent.<sup>4</sup> Astro-

<sup>1</sup> Read before the American Anthropological Association at Philadelphia.

<sup>2</sup> Hagar, *Int. Cong. of Americanists*, 17th Sess. (Mexico), pp. 140-159; 18th Sess., pp. 137-139.

<sup>3</sup> Seler, *Bu. of Am. Ethnology*, Bull. 28, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Brinton, *Primer of Mayan Hieroglyphs*, p. 111.

nomically, this day must be assigned to the eastern portion or tail of our constellation of the Scorpion for the symbolism indicates that the preceding day sign must pertain to Scorpio and the following day signs to Sagittarius. Two variants of the Manik glyph in the Books of Chilan Balam present the conventionalized tail and sting of the scorpion.<sup>1</sup> Now a glance at the alignment of the stars of the Scorpion's tail ( $\epsilon$  to  $\nu$ ) should disclose the plainly marked figure of the grasping hand. But we need not depend upon our imagination in this instance. The Maya recognized the Zinaan ek or Scorpion asterism.<sup>2</sup> We know that they had so named it in pre-Cortesian times because it is figured in the pre-Cortesian codex Tro-Cortesianus. It is also seen in the wall paintings at Mitla; it is associated with the Maya deity, Ek chuh, Black Scorpion or Star Scorpion; and it is named by Tezozomoc and Sahagun amongst Mexican constellations which show no trace of European influence. We know that it must be identified with our own constellation of the Scorpion because of its position in the sequence of these constellation symbols, because the Maya Uinal period, Tzec or Scorpion, corresponds in time with the entrance of the sun into this sign, and because Sahagun asserts this identification. Indeed the stars of Libra and Scorpio present the figure of a scorpion so unique and conspicuous in the sky as to justify as at least probable an assignment to it without further evidence, of all asterisms bearing the name of that insect.<sup>3</sup> If now we examine the representation of the scorpion

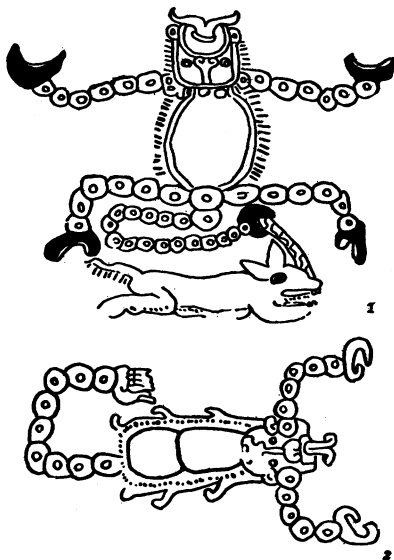


FIG. 88.—The Scorpion in the Codex Tro-Cortesianus (after Tozzer and Allen).

<sup>1</sup> See Bowditch, *Maya Numeration*, Plate II, Nos. 10, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Brinton, work cited, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hagar in *16th Sess. Int. Cong. of Am.*, pp. 278-291-292.

on page 48c of the codex Tro-Cortesianus we shall observe that a grasping claw has been substituted for the sting at the tip of the tail. On page 44c of the same codex the sting is replaced by a human hand with fingers closed as in grasping. In fact in the Maya codices the tail of the scorpion usually terminated in a grasping organ (fig. 88).<sup>1</sup> In the first representation the object grasped is a rope to which a deer is fastened below. This is the zodiacal rope or the ecliptic similarly figured at Mitla, Santa Rita, and on page 19 of the same codex. The deer is the symbol of the opposite sign, Taurus, correctly placed with respect to the Scorpion.

Thus we are led to the conclusion that the day sign, Grasping Hand, owes its name to the configuration of the stars of which it was the symbol. Its glyph, contrary to the usual position of Maya glyphs, is horizontal in accord with the aspect of those stars.

Perez gives "that which was" as a possible meaning of Manik and Brasseur de Bourbourg "the breath has passed."<sup>2</sup> These meanings harmonize very well with the predominant death symbolism of the Maya Scorpio asterism which is associated with the death god, death head, and with the day sign, Cimi, which precedes Manik and has the meaning, dead. Possibly therefore, like the sting of the scorpion which it replaced, Manik was supposed to symbolize the hand of death, and to be pulling the sun downwards into the darkness and death of the winter. But if it was connected with death it certainly also represented resurrection in contrast with the death symbols preceding it.

At Izamal we seem to see a reflection of the Grasping Hand in the temple called Kabul the Working Hand, dedicated to the sign Scorpio. This edifice is said to have contained the image of the hand with which the death god healed the sick and restored the dead to life. Another reflection of this miraculous hand is apparently found in the Maya festival Chich Caban, the Calling Down of the Great Hand. This ritual was celebrated on the last day of the Scorpio uinal or month Xul or End but it evidently pertained to the following uinal Yax Kin. This uinal was also

<sup>1</sup> Tozzer and Allen, *Animal Figures in the Maya Codices*, pp. 305-306, Plate 4.

<sup>2</sup> See Bowditch, *Maya Numeration*, p. 263.

governed by Scorpio and it held exactly the same position amongst the uinals as did Manik amongst the day signs. In this ritual the Maya celebrated the return to earth of their principal deity Cuculcan who was believed to have ascended to the sky amongst the gods during Xul. The myth probably refers to his death and resurrection, for Xul is the symbol of death and Yax Kin of returning life.<sup>1</sup>

Again, the deity Ek Chuh, who occupies the position of Scorpio in the so-called spear-throwers group on page 49 of the Dresden Codex, holds his right hand in the position of the Manik symbol.

Finally, though this is admittedly speculative at present, there may be some connection between this symbolism and that of the mysterious impress of the human hand so often found upon the walls of Maya temples. Was it a prayer to the Death God for restoration of health or preservation of life?

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<sup>1</sup> See Hagar, *Am. Anthropologist*, N.S., Vol. XV, pp. 17-18-24-31.